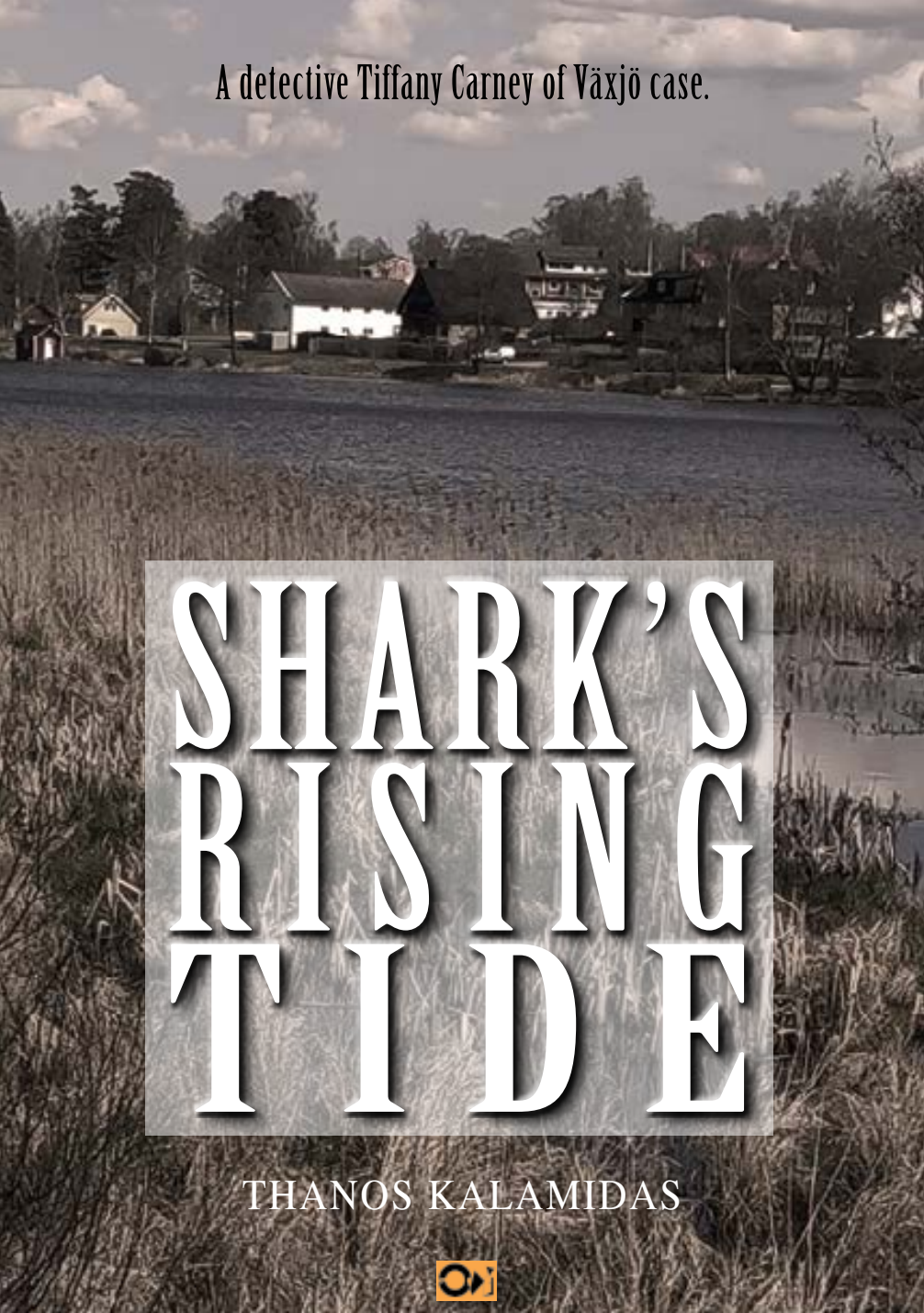
A detective Tiffany Carney of Växjö case.
SHARK'S RISING TIDE
THANOS KALAMIDAS

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Thanos Kalamidas

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He was a man who had always believed himself to be at the center of his own universe, the sun around which all lesser bodies, women, creditors, city councillors, were obliged to orbit. So it was a final exquisite irony that Fabien Tucker was found not in a position of power but in one of abject, ridiculous vulnerability. Naked. Prone. Laid out on the cold, granite plinth of the statue of his grandfather, the venerable Barnaby Tucker, as if making a final, obscene offering to the dynasty that had spawned him.

The early morning mist coiled around the bronze effigy of the old mayor and around the very real, very dead body of his grandson. A single, deep crimson wound marred the centre of his chest, a second eye that stared sightlessly at the paling sky.

The city of Willesden would wake to a scandal that would crack its very foundations and Detective Tiffany Carney, a woman newly acquainted with the vast, echoing silence of loss, would be the one tasked with fitting the pieces back together. She knew with a grim certainty that settled in her bones, that the easiest answer was rarely the true one and in Willesden the truth was always buried under layers of money, lies and the long, creeping rot of entitlement.

1.
The empty house

The call came at 5:47 a.m. Tiffany Carney was already awake, lying in the dark of her bedroom, listening to the absence of sound. For twenty-three years that silence had been filled by Michael's breathing; a soft, rhythmic susurrus that had been the metronome of her life. Now, the silence was a tangible thing, a third presence in the bed, cold and demanding.

She dressed in the dark, a habit from decades of being roused for the unexpected. The suit was navy, the shirt a pale grey. Her hair, a no-nonsense silver bob, required only a swift comb. As she descended the stairs her hand ran automatically over the polished wood of the banister, a touch she'd repeated thousands of times. The house in Kensal Rise was immaculate, a museum of a shared life. Michael's

slippers were still by the armchair where he'd spent his last weeks, a paperback on the side table, the bookmark exactly one-third of the way through. She hadn't moved them. Moving them felt like an admission she wasn't ready to make.

The scene at the Barnaby Tucker Memorial Plaza was already a circus. Blue lights bled colour into the grey dawn and uniformed officers held back the first wave of reporters, their cameras eager to capture the degradation of the city's most infamous son. Tiffany ducked under the tape, her warrant card held aloft. The air had the metallic tang of early morning and something else, the faint; sweet-sick smell of death that she knew as well as her own name.

The body was as described. Fabien Tucker. Forty-three. Mayor. Womanizer. Corrupt, if the rumours that had swirled around the town hall for the last three years were to be believed. He lay on his back, arms flung out, a man crucified on the plinth of his own family's legacy. The wound to his chest was precise, a neat puncture. Not a bullet. A blade, then. Long and thin. A stiletto, perhaps ...or a specially crafted knife.

Dr. Raj Patel, the forensic medical examiner, was already there crouching beside the body, his breath

misting in the cold air. He looked up as she approached, his eyes tired but sharp.

"Tiffany. A nasty piece of work. Not the death... the life... from what I hear. Though the death is no picnic either."

"Time?"

"I'd put it between midnight and two a.m. Rigor is well established. Lividity is fixed. He was killed here, not moved. See the pooling in the back?" He gestured. "The cold would have slowed things down but he's been here a while."

Tiffany looked at the body, forcing her mind to clinical detachment. The nakedness was a statement. A humiliation. Someone wanted Fabien Tucker not just dead but diminished. Stripped of his mayoral chains, his expensive suits, his very dignity. She looked up at the bronze statue of Barnaby Tucker, a stern-faced Victorian in a frock coat. His bronze eyes stared out over the city he'd helped build. Now his grandson lay at his feet, a rotting sacrifice on the family altar.

"Anything?" she asked.

"One thing of interest," Patel said, holding up a clear evidence bag. Inside was a woman's earring. A

single, elegant pearl teardrop on a platinum hook. It wasn't cheap. "Found clutched in his right hand. A last, desperate grab, perhaps."

Tiffany took the bag, holding it to the light. It was distinctive. High-end. She could already hear the whispers, the pointed fingers. The wife. It was always the wife.

Her phone buzzed. It was the Chief Constable, his voice a taut wire. "Carney. I'm getting pressure from every corner of this city. The council, the Tucker family's lawyers, the Chamber of Commerce. They want this sewn up. They want a name and they want it before the midday news."

So things had moved fast and without her.

"I'll need time, sir."

"Time is a luxury we don't have. They're circling the wife, Samantha Tucker. I'm told she has no alibi. I'm told she was seen arguing with him in public two days ago. I'm told she has… a history of not taking his infidelities quietly."

"I'll follow the evidence, sir. Not the pressure."

There was a pause. "See that you do. But see that you do it fast." The line went dead.

Tiffany looked back at the body, at the pearl earring, at the silent, judging bronze grandfather. Everyone wanted her to go after the wife. It was too easy. And Tiffany Carney had spent thirty years learning that the easy path was the one paved with lies.

Her first stop was the Tucker mansion, a monstrous neo-Georgian pile on the edge of Hampstead Heath. The gates were already besieged by paparazzi. She was let in by a pale-faced butler who led her to a vast, silent kitchen where Samantha Tucker sat at a granite island, a cup of untouched tea growing cold before her.

Samantha was a striking woman, ten years younger than her husband, with the kind of brittle beauty that came from expensive maintenance. Her blonde hair was perfectly coiffed, her silk dressing gown immaculate but her eyes were red-rimmed. She held a tissue in one hand, twisting it into a tight rope.

"Mrs. Tucker," Tiffany said, showing her identification. "I'm Detective Carney. I'm very sorry for your loss."

Samantha let out a short, sharp laugh that was half a sob. “Loss? Is that what we’re calling it? A relief would be more accurate. Does that make me sound like a monster?”

“It makes you sound honest. Where were you last night, between midnight and two a.m.?”

Samantha’s eyes flickered. “Here. In bed. Alone.” She twisted the tissue tighter. “Fabien wasn’t here. He was rarely here. I suppose I should have been grateful for the peace.”

“Can anyone corroborate that?”

“The staff are dismissed by ten. I was alone. I am always alone in this mausoleum.” She looked directly at Tiffany then, a challenge in her gaze. “I know what they’re saying. The newspapers, the gossips. That I finally snapped. That I took a knife to him. But I didn’t. I despised him, Detective. But I didn’t kill him.”

Tiffany sighed, so things had moved fast all directions while she was getting ready to visit the scene for the first time. She felt a slow anger rising inside her. Of course, a police department leaking from everywhere and a ...how did he put it? “Getting pressure from every corner of this city.” Oh she was feeling

the pressure already and it was not normal. And she didn't like things not been ...normal.

"Did you own a pair of pearl earrings like this?" Tiffany placed the evidence bag on the granite counter.

Samantha stared at it, a flicker of genuine surprise crossing her face. "Yes. They were a gift from my mother. They went missing from my jewellery case three weeks ago. I reported it to the insurance company but not the police. I assumed one of his… ladies… had helped herself. He had a habit of bringing them into the house when he thought I was away." Her voice dripped with acid.

"Who would have had access?"

"Anyone he brought here. His brother, Douglas for one, forever in and out always looking for money. His business partner, Gabriel Ware, who treats this place like his own personal boardroom. And of course ...any number of women."

Tiffany nodded slowly. The easy suspect was crumbling. A wife who'd reported the earring missing before the murder? That was a fact the pressure-cooker upstairs wouldn't want to hear. "Thank you, Mrs.

Tucker. I'll need you to come to the station later to make a formal statement. And I'll need a full list of everyone who has been in this house in the last month."

As she was shown out, Tiffany passed a hallway lined with portraits of stern-faced Tuckers. At the end was a more recent photograph: Fabien with his arm around a younger, handsomer man with the same dark eyes but a weaker jaw. Douglas. And standing on Fabien's other side, a man with a face like a well-fed shark, his smile not quite reaching his eyes. Gabriel Ware.

2.
The money and the blood

Gabriel Ware's office occupied the top floor of the Willesden Tower, a glass-and-steel phallus that had been the late mayor's pet project. The views were panoramic, a god's-eye view of the city Fabien had ruled. Tiffany was kept waiting for twenty minutes, a deliberate play of power. When she was finally ushered in Ware was behind a vast desk, a man in his late forties with slicked-back hair and a suit that cost more than a month of her salary. The air smelled of money and leather.

"Detective Carney," he said, not rising. "A terrible business. Fabien was… a complex man. A visionary."

"Is that what you call it? I've heard other terms. Womanizer. Embezzler. Puppet."

A flicker of annoyance crossed Ware's face, there and gone. "Fabien had his appetites, yes. But he was the public face. The ideas, the drive, the financial architecture ...that was a partnership."

"A partnership that included his wife's earring?" Tiffany placed the photo of the pearl earring on his desk.

Ware barely glanced at it. "I have no idea what that is. I deal in numbers, not jewellery."

"You also deal in loans. High-interest loans to the town hall. To Tucker Industries. To Fabien Tucker personally ...from what I'm told. He owed you a significant amount of money, didn't he?"

Ware's smile was thin. "Fabien's cash flow was… erratic. I was a facilitator. A friend. His debts to me were serviced regularly."

"Were they? Or was he on the verge of default? And if he defaulted, what would happen to your… architecture? Your 'partnership' with the Tucker name?"

The smile vanished. "Are you suggesting I had a motive to kill my business partner?"

"I'm asking where you were last night, between midnight and two a.m."

"I was at home. In Chelsea. Alone." He leaned forward, his eyes hard. "My lawyer will provide you with my phone records, my security footage. I have nothing to hide. Unlike poor Samantha. A woman scorned and ...you know ...all that. You should be looking at her, Detective. She had the access, the means and a century of rage." He paused, letting the insinuation hang in the air. "Or perhaps his brother. Douglas is… unstable. A gambler with a habit of lashing out when the money runs out. And Fabien had just cut him off. Permanently."

"You seem very keen to direct my attention elsewhere, Mr. Ware."

"I'm keen for you to catch the person who murdered my friend and destabilized my business. Self-interest, Detective. The purest motive there is."

She left him with a promise to be in touch, her instincts screaming. Ware was too smooth, too controlled. He was a man who saw people as assets or liabilities. Fabien Tucker, she suspected, had just become a major liability.

Her next stop was a squat rundown flat in a part of Willesden that hadn't benefited from the late mayor's regeneration schemes. Douglas Tucker opened the door, looking like a man who hadn't slept in a week. He was wearing yesterday's clothes, his eyes were bloodshot and his hands trembled slightly. The smell of stale sweat and something else, a sweet, chemical scent drifted from inside.

"You're the detective," he said, his voice hoarse. "Come to arrest me? Everyone thinks I did it. My own mother called me, screaming."

"May I come in, Mr. Tucker?"

He shrugged and led her into a chaotic living room. Papers were strewn everywhere; betting slips, bank statements, final demands. On a coffee table, next to an ashtray overflowing with stubs was a small mirror with a trace of white powder.

"I have a problem," Douglas said, slumping onto a sofa. "I don't hide it. Fabien used it against me my whole life. The golden child and the fuck-up. He gave me an allowance, a leash. And last week, he cut me off. Said I'd embarrassed him one too many times. Said I was a 'liability'." He laughed bitterly. "That was his favourite word. Everyone was either an asset or a liability."

"Where were you last night?"

"Here. Getting drunk. Feeling sorry for myself." He gestured to a half-empty bottle of whisky. "Alone."

"You and everyone else," Tiffany murmured. "You had a fight with your brother. He cut off your money. You have a history of impulsive, destructive behaviour. You were seen at the family house last week. Did you take the earring?"

Douglas's head snapped up. "What earring?"

"Your sister-in-law's pearl earring. It was found in Fabien's hand."

His face went pale, then red. "I didn't take any bloody earring. I went to the house to beg. Like a dog. Samantha threw me out. She called me a parasite. She wasn't wrong." He put his head in his hands. "I hated him. I hated him for being our father's favourite, for having everything handed to him, for treating me like dirt. But I didn't kill him. I don't have the nerve. I never have."

Tiffany believed him. The man was a wreck, but he didn't have the cold, calculated malice the murder required. The staging, the nakedness, the statue, the precise wound, spoke of a focused, deliberate fury.

A gambler's rage was chaotic, desperate. This was something else.

Back at the station, the pressure was mounting. The Chief Constable had called twice. A councillor had been on the phone, demanding an arrest. The news was running a segment on "The Tucker Tragedy," already framing Samantha as the jilted wife pushed over the edge.

Tiffany stood in front of the evidence board she'd started. A photo of Fabien's body. The earring. Photos of the three suspects. Samantha, Douglas, Gabriel Ware. She wrote their names and motives. Samantha: humiliation, betrayal. Douglas: financial ruin, lifelong resentment. Gabriel Ware: financial exposure, loss of control.

She added a fourth column: Means. She tapped her pen on it. The weapon was a long, thin blade. A stiletto. A knife used for precision, for close work. Not the blunt instrument of a rage-filled wife or a desperate brother. A professional's tool? Or a personal one, wielded by someone who wanted to feel the blade go in.

Her phone rang. It was the forensic accountant she'd asked to look into Ware's dealings.

"Tiffany, you're not going to like this," the accountant said. "I've only scratched the surface, but the Tucker Industries accounts are a mess. There's a huge black hole. Money has been siphoned off for years. And the trail leads to a shell company that was set up by one of Fabien's personal assistants."

"Which one?"

"A woman named Nina Marchetti. She left Tucker Industries six months ago. No forwarding address."

Tiffany's pulse quickened. A missing personal assistant. A shell company. Ware's controlled fury. The earring that had gone missing from the house. She was looking at a picture that was far bigger than a simple crime of passion. It was about money. It was always about money. And someone had just silenced the man who was about to bring the whole rotten edifice down.

3.
The widow's network

Tiffany spent the evening in her empty house, the silence pressing in on her. She'd made herself a simple dinner, eaten half of it and thrown the rest away. Cooking for one was a cruel arithmetic. She sat in Michael's armchair, not her own and opened his paperback. It was a Le Carré, a spy novel. He'd loved the intricate deceptions, the moral grey areas. She could almost hear his voice, explaining the plot to her.

Her grief was not a sharp pain but a dull, pervasive ache. It was in the absence of his coffee cup on the counter, the lack of his key in the lock at six-fifteen, the unbearable quiet of the bedroom. She'd been a detective for thirty years, had compartmentalized

horrors that would break most people but this ...this was a different kind of investigation. One with no answers, no closure, only a void.

She forced herself to focus. She pulled out her notes. Nina Marchetti. She ran the name through the police database. No criminal record. But there was a driver's license with an address in a part of Willesden that was still working-class, untouched by the Tucker money. A flat above a launderette.

The next morning, she went there. The launderette was humming with early-bird customers. She climbed the narrow, uncarpeted stairs and knocked on a door that had once been painted blue. It was opened by a woman in her late twenties, with dark, intelligent eyes and a guarded expression. She was wearing jeans and a jumper, no makeup. She looked nothing like the polished, confidential secretary Tiffany had imagined.

"Nina Marchetti?"

"Who's asking?"

Tiffany showed her warrant card. "I need to ask you some questions about Fabien Tucker."

The woman's face went through a rapid series of micro-expressions, fear, resignation and then a hard-won composure. "Well ...I've been expecting this. Come in."

The flat was small but meticulously tidy. It was the home of someone who was trying to stay under the radar. No clutter, no photographs. Nina sat down at a small kitchen table and folded her hands.

"You left your job at Tucker Industries six months ago," Tiffany said, taking the seat opposite. "No notice, no forwarding address. Why?"

"Because I found something I wasn't supposed to find." Nina's voice was steady. "I was Fabien's PA. I saw everything. The personal stuff ...the women, the lies to his wife, well, that was just sad. But the money… I stumbled onto a set of accounts he was keeping separate. Off-book. He was skimming from the regeneration fund, from Tucker Industries, from a dozen different pots. Millions of pounds."

"And you went to the police?"

Nina let out a hollow laugh. "I went to Fabien first. Stupidly. I thought he might be horrified, that it was some kind of mistake. He wasn't. He was terrified.

He begged me to keep quiet. Said he was going to fix it. That it was a temporary measure." She shook her head. "Then I got a visit from Gabriel Ware. He was… polite. He explained that if I said anything, my elderly mother, who lives in Haling Cove, might have an accident. That my own work history would be 're-examined' and they'd find all sorts of discrepancies. He had a file. On me. On my mother. On a cousin who'd had a minor brush with the law years ago. He knew everything."

"So you ran."

"I hid. I moved here. I've been working in a café and living on cash. Waiting for the other shoe to drop." She looked at Tiffany, her eyes bright with unshed tears. "I didn't kill him, Detective. But I wasn't sorry when I heard he was dead. I was relieved. The only person who could connect me to that evidence was gone."

"What evidence?"

"A USB drive. I made a copy of everything before I left. It's hidden somewhere safe."

"If Fabien was the one skimming, why would Ware threaten you? Why wouldn't he just let Fabien hang?"

Nina paused, choosing her words carefully. "Because I don't think Fabien was the mastermind. He was a narcissist, a spendthrift but he wasn't enough ...clever. He didn't have the patience for that kind of financial architecture. Gabriel Ware did. I think Fabien was taking a cut, but the real money, the architecture of it... that was Ware's. And Fabien was getting nervous. He'd started talking about 'cleaning things up,' 'coming clean.' I think Ware was using me as leverage to keep Fabien in line. A threat he held over him. 'Keep quiet, or I'll expose your PA and all the evidence she has.'"

Tiffany sat back. It was a perfect motive. Fabien Tucker had become a liability. He was talking about confessing. He was a loose cannon. And Gabriel Ware, the man who controlled the money, had decided to cut his losses ...permanently.

"I need that USB drive, Nina. If what you're saying is true, it's the key to everything."

Nina shook her head, fear returning to her eyes. "If I give it to you, I'm dead. Ware will find out."

"You're already a target. You've been a loose end since you left. The only way to protect yourself is

to bring the whole thing into the light. Give me the drive. Let me do my job."

After a long, tense silence, Nina rose and went to the kitchen. She pulled out a box of laundry powder, opened it, and from deep within, extracted a small USB drive wrapped in plastic. She handed it to Tiffany as if it were a live grenade.

"If anything happens to me," she said quietly, "you'll know who did it."

Back in her car, Tiffany called her contact in the financial crimes unit. "I need you to work on something for me. Discreetly. It's a USB drive with evidence of a massive embezzlement operation linked to Tucker Industries and Gabriel Ware. I need a full analysis but I need it to stay between us for now."

She was about to drive off when her phone buzzed. It was a text from an unknown number. 'Meet me. The boathouse, Hampstead Ponds. 2pm. Come alone. It's about Fabien. – S.T.'

Samantha Tucker. Meeting in secret. Tiffany's detective instinct flared. It could be a trap, a plea, or a confession. She checked her watch. She had an hour. She texted back a single word: 'Confirmed.'

4.
The confession of the widow

The boathouse at Hampstead Ponds was a dilapidated Victorian structure, unused and forgotten, its wooden walls grey with age. Tiffany arrived early, as was her habit and waited in the shadows of a nearby copse of trees. At precisely two o'clock, a figure emerged from the path, bundled in a long coat and a hat pulled low. It was Samantha Tucker.

She unlocked the boathouse door with a key and slipped inside. Tiffany gave her a minute, then followed. The interior smelled of damp wood and stagnant water. Samantha was standing by a window that overlooked the dark, oily surface of the pond.

"You came alone," Samantha said, not turning around.

"You asked me to. Why the secrecy, Mrs. Tucker? You could have come to the station."

Samantha turned. In the dim light, her face looked older, the mask of the society wife stripped away. "Because I'm not a fool. My phone is tapped. My house is watched. Gabriel Ware has people everywhere. I needed to tell you something and I couldn't do it anywhere he might hear."

"Tell me what?"

"That I lied to you. About my alibi." She took a breath. "I wasn't at home all night. I went out. I drove to the Plaza. I saw him."

Tiffany's heart rate didn't change, but her focus sharpened to a laser point. "Go on."

"I couldn't sleep. The rage was like a physical thing, eating me from the inside. I'd found out, earlier that day, that he'd given one of his women a set of my grandmother's pearls. The only thing of value my family had left. I'd been saving them for our daughter ...who doesn't exist because he never wanted chil-

dren. He just took them. Gave them away like they were nothing. Like I was nothing."

"So you went to confront him."

"I drove to the Plaza. I parked around the corner. I walked to the statue. And he was there. Naked. Already dead." Her voice cracked. "I stood there for I don't know how long, just staring at him. At first, I felt nothing. Then I felt… relief. And then I felt terror. I knew what it would look like. A wife with no alibi, a history of fights, found standing over her dead husband's body."

"You touched him. You took something."

Samantha's eyes widened. "How did you..."

"There was no defensive bruising on his hands or arms. The only thing out of place was a missing earring from your jewellery box, found clutched in his hand. If you'd found him dead, you would have seen it. You would have taken it. To distance yourself."

Samantha's hand flew to her mouth. "Oh, God. I didn't even think. I saw the earring ...my mother's earring and I just… I took it. I pulled it from his fingers and I ran. I threw it in a drain on the way home."

She was crying now, silent tears streaming down her face. "I'm a fool. I've made myself look guilty."

"You've made yourself look like a woman who was terrified of being fitted up for a murder she didn't commit," Tiffany said, her voice softer than it had been. "I believe you. But you need to tell me everything. What did you see when you got there? Was there anyone else? A car? A sound?"

Samantha shook her head. "No. Just him. And the statue. The light from the streetlamps made it look almost… theatrical. Like he'd been posed."

"Posed," Tiffany repeated. That was the word. It was a tableau. A message.

"There was one thing," Samantha said slowly. "As I was leaving, I saw a car. A black Range Rover. It was parked on the far side of the plaza, with its lights off. It pulled away just as I got to my own car. I didn't see the driver. But I know that car. It belongs to Gabriel Ware."

Tiffany felt the pieces begin to slot into place, but the picture wasn't complete. The motive was there; Ware, silencing a partner who was about to blow the whistle on a multi-million-pound embezzlement.

But the method was all wrong. Ware was a man who used leverage, threats, files, and other people to do his dirty work. He was a behind-the-scenes operator, not a man who would personally stab someone and pose their naked body on a statue. It was too visceral, too personal, too… emotional.

"Mrs. Tucker, I need you to trust me. Go back to your house. Stay there. Say nothing to anyone about this conversation. I am going to find out who killed your husband. And when I do, you will need to be ready to testify to what you saw here."

Samantha nodded, wiping her face. "What about Ware? He's dangerous."

"He's a financier," Tiffany said dryly. "His weapons are lawsuits and ruined credit ratings. The person who killed Fabien used a blade. That's a different kind of weapon, wielded by a different kind of person. Someone who knew him. Someone who despised him on a level that went beyond money."

She left Samantha at the boathouse and drove back to the station, her mind racing. The USB drive was with the financial crimes unit. She needed to accelerate that process. She also needed to talk to Douglas Tucker again, to push him harder. But her gut was

telling her that neither Samantha, Douglas, nor Ware had the right psychological profile for this murder. The killer was someone else. Someone who had been in the shadows from the start.

She pulled into the station car park and saw a familiar figure waiting by her designated spot. It was Chief Constable Harrison, his face a mask of controlled fury.

"Carney. My office. Now."

5.
The web of power

Harrison's office was on the top floor, a carpeted realm far removed from the linoleum and fluorescent lights of the CID bullpen. He was a man built for television appearances, with a strong jaw and a head of silver hair. He didn't offer her a seat.

"I've had the Home Secretary's office on the phone," he said, his voice low and dangerous. "I've had the city's leading QC, who happens to be a personal friend of the Tucker family, threatening to have my job if we don't make an arrest. And I've had Gabriel Ware's lawyers filing a formal complaint about police harassment."

"Mr. Ware has been cooperative," Tiffany said evenly.

"He's been harassed. According to his lawyers, you've been spreading unfounded accusations about his business practices, implying he had a motive to kill his partner. That's slander, Carney. It's a lawsuit waiting to happen."

"I'm following a line of inquiry, sir. There is evidence of large-scale financial impropriety involving Tucker Industries and Mr. Ware's companies. I have a witness who can place Mr. Ware's vehicle at the scene of the crime."

Harrison's eyes narrowed. "A witness? Who?"

"I'm not at liberty to say at this stage."

"You're not at liberty?" He slammed a hand on his desk. "I am giving you a direct order. You will drop this line of inquiry into Mr. Ware. You will focus on the wife, Samantha Tucker, who has no alibi, a clear motive and who we now know was seen at the crime scene by a witness we have in custody for an unrelated matter, a witness who saw her standing over the body."

Tiffany felt a cold sensation in her stomach. “What witness?”

“A vagrant who was sleeping in the Plaza. He came forward this morning. He gave a statement describing a woman matching Samantha Tucker’s description, in a long coat, at the statue around one a.m. He saw her pull something from the body and flee.”

“Why wasn’t I immediately informed, sir?”

“You were occupied harassing Ware, that why.” He snapped.

She was getting really angry but she decided to change direction.

“He didn’t see the actual murder?”

“He was drunk, he says. He heard a noise, looked up, saw the woman. It’s enough. We have her at the scene, with the murder weapon still out there somewhere and no alibi. You will charge her.”

Tiffany stood her ground. “Sir, with respect, that’s circumstantial. The witness didn’t see her commit the murder. And we have evidence that points elsewhere. The financial crimes unit is analyzing a USB drive that...”

"The USB drive is a dead end," Harrison cut her off. "The financial crimes unit reported to me this morning. The drive contains nothing but old company memos and a few spreadsheets. No evidence of embezzlement. No connection to Mr. Ware. It's a red herring, Carney. Or perhaps a desperate attempt by a frightened woman to throw us off the scent."

Tiffany's blood ran cold. She'd personally handed the drive to a contact she trusted. Now that contact had gone over her head to the Chief Constable and the evidence had conveniently vanished? Or been buried? The implications were staggering. The pressure wasn't just coming from outside. It was coming from inside her own building.

"Sir, I need more time. There are other avenues. The brother, Douglas, had a violent argument with the victim the day before. And there's a former employee, Nina Marchetti, who..."

"Douglas Tucker is a pathetic addict who doesn't have the nerve to kill a fly. Nina Marchetti is a disgruntled former employee with a grudge and a history of mental instability, according to her personnel file provided by Tucker Industries. You're chasing ghosts, Carney." He leaned forward, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial murmur. "I know this is a dif-

ficult time for you. Losing your husband… it changes a person. Clouds their judgment. Perhaps you need to take some leave. Let a fresh pair of eyes take over the case."

The mention of Michael was a low blow, a calculated attempt to destabilize her. It confirmed what she'd begun to suspect. Harrison wasn't just incompetent or politically pressured. He was compromised.

"I don't need leave, sir. I need to do my job."

"Your job is to follow orders. You will prepare a case against Samantha Tucker. You will present it to the CPS by end of day tomorrow. If you are unwilling or unable to do that, I will find someone who is. Are we clear?"

Tiffany met his gaze. She saw the fear there, the desperation. This wasn't about justice. It was about control. Someone had gotten to Harrison. Someone with enough power to threaten a Chief Constable.

"Crystal," she said, her voice devoid of inflection. She turned and walked out, her mind already working on a new plan.

She didn't go back to the bullpen. She walked out of the station, got in her car, and drove. She needed

to think. Harrison's words echoed in her head. 'The USB drive contains nothing.' It was a lie. She knew what Nina had given her. The drive had been either intercepted or wiped. And the convenient vagrant witness who'd appeared out of nowhere to point the finger at Samantha? A plant. The whole thing was a frame-up, orchestrated by someone with deep pockets and a long reach.

She drove to Nina Marchetti's flat. The door was ajar. She drew her service weapon, a Sig Sauer, and entered on silent feet. The flat was destroyed. Cushions slashed, drawers pulled out, the kitchen floor littered with laundry powder. But there was no blood. No Nina. She was gone.

Tiffany holstered her weapon and stood in the wreckage. They'd gotten to Nina. And they'd gotten to the evidence. She was alone now, a detective without a department, a widow in an empty house, hunting a killer in a city that had closed ranks against her.

Her phone buzzed. A text from an unknown number. 'If you want the truth, stop looking at the money. Look at the blood. – A friend.'

The blood. She closed her eyes, conjuring the image of Fabien's body. The precise wound. The staging.

The nakedness. This wasn't about money. It never had been. The money was a smokescreen, a motive so obvious and so convenient that it had blinded her. This was personal. This was about a humiliation so deep, a rage so profound, that it could only be answered by stripping the victim bare and laying him at the feet of the man he'd most wanted to impress.

She opened her eyes. The statue. Barnaby Tucker. The grandfather Fabien had spent his whole life trying to emulate, to impress. The ultimate judge. The killer hadn't just killed Fabien. They'd presented him to his grandfather's judgment. They'd shown the old man what his legacy had truly become.

Who would want to do that? Not a wife. Not a business partner. Not a jealous brother.

Someone for whom Barnaby Tucker represented something else entirely. Someone with a connection to the old mayor that predated Fabien.

She got back in her car and drove to the Willesden library, a grand Victorian building that had somehow survived the city's modernization. She spent the next two hours in the local history section, scrolling through microfilm of old newspapers. Barnaby Tucker. His mayoralty in the 1970s. His death in 1989. His

son, Fabien's father, who'd died in a car accident in 1995, leaving the Tucker empire to a teenage Fabien and his younger brother, Douglas. There were photos of the funeral. A young Fabien, already handsome and arrogant, his arm around his weeping mother. And there, in the background of one photo, was a face she recognized. Younger, with hair and without the suit, but unmistakable. Gabriel Ware.

She dug deeper. A small article from 1982: "Mayor Barnaby Tucker Denies Favouritism in Construction Bids. Opposition Councillor Alleges Dealings with 'Unscrupulous Developers.'" She cross-referenced the developer's name. A shell company. Dissolved in 1985. The director? A name she didn't recognize. But the registered address was the same as the current headquarters of Ware Investments.

She sat back, the pieces forming a new, darker picture. Gabriel Ware's connection to the Tucker family wasn't just through Fabien. It went back to the grandfather. Barnaby Tucker had been corrupt from the start and Gabriel Ware's father ...or perhaps Ware himself as a young man, had been his partner. The rot was generational. And Fabien, for all his faults, had been on the verge of exposing it. He'd been about to betray the family legacy, to confess. And someone

had decided that the legacy of Barnaby Tucker had to be protected at all costs.

Her phone rang. It was the station. A patrol officer, his voice excited. “Detective Carney, we’ve got a break. A neighbour reported a disturbance at Douglas Tucker’s flat. We went in. He was there, covered in blood. He’s confessed. He’s saying he killed his brother.”

6.
The second confession

Tiffany found Douglas Tucker in an interview room at the station. He was a wreck, his clothes stained with what looked like blood, his hands shaking uncontrollably. A duty solicitor sat beside him, a young woman who looked out of her depth. Through the one-way glass, Tiffany watched him for a long moment. He was crying, his face buried in his hands. This wasn't the demeanour of a man who had just unburdened himself of a secret. This was the demeanour of a man who was terrified.

She entered the room. "Out," she said to the uniformed officer who was standing guard. He hesitated then left. She sat down opposite Douglas. "Tell me what happened."

"I killed him," Douglas said, his voice a monotone. "I went to the Plaza. We argued. I had a knife. I

stabbed him. I don't remember the rest. I was drunk. I was high."

"Where did you get the knife?"

"I… I don't remember."

"Where did you get the blood on your clothes, Douglas?"

He looked down at his shirt, as if seeing it for the first time. "From him. When I stabbed him."

"If you stabbed him at close range, there would be blood spatter on your face, your hands, your forearms. There's none there, Douglas. It's on your chest, your shirt. It looks like it was poured on you, not sprayed. Who told you to say this?"

His eyes darted to the solicitor, then away. "No one. I did it. I confessed. That's all that matters."

"It matters to me that an innocent man doesn't go to prison for a crime he didn't commit." She leaned forward. "Your brother was stabbed with a long, thin blade, a stiletto. The wound was precise. It was made by someone who knew what they were doing, not a drunken, drugged-up man in a rage. You're a gambler, Douglas. And someone just made you an offer

you couldn't refuse. What was it? A clean slate? Your debts paid off? Protection from Ware?"

Douglas's face crumpled. He looked at the solicitor, who gave a tiny, almost imperceptible shake of her head. "I can't," he whispered.

"Gabriel Ware has you, doesn't he? He's been your real creditor all along. The gambling debts weren't to bookies, they were to him. He's owned you for years. And now he's offering you a way out, take the fall for your brother's murder and he'll wipe the slate clean. He'll let you live. But if you don't…" She let the threat hang in the air.

"You don't understand," Douglas said, his voice cracking. "He has files on everyone. He knows everything. He knows about the money I took from the family accounts, the people I owe, the… the other things." He looked at the solicitor again, desperation in his eyes. "He said if I didn't confess, he'd give it all to the police. I'd go to prison for fraud, for embezzlement. My mother would find out about… everything. He said this was my only chance."

"He's lying, Douglas. You'd be going to prison for murder. That's not a chance, that's a death sentence. He's using you. Just like he used your brother."

“Fabien was going to expose him,” Douglas said, the words tumbling out. “He told me. A few days before he died. He was scared. He said Ware had been bleeding the company dry for decades, that it went back to our grandfather. Fabien was going to go to the police, to the newspapers. He said it was the only way to be free of him. I told him not to. I told him Ware would kill him. And he did. He killed him and now he wants me to die for it.”

Tiffany looked at the duty solicitor. “You’re going to need to advise your client to retract his confession and cooperate fully with this investigation. If you don’t, I will personally ensure that the Bar Council hears about your role in coercing a false confession from a vulnerable individual.”

The solicitor paled. “I was only doing what Mr. Ware’s lawyers...”

“You were doing what you were told,” Tiffany cut her off. “Now you’re going to do what’s right.”

She left them and went straight to the Chief Constable’s office. She didn’t knock. Harrison was on the phone, his face red with anger. He slammed the receiver down when he saw her.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, Carney? I gave you a direct order."

"You gave me an order to frame an innocent woman," Tiffany said, her voice calm but carrying the full weight of her thirty years of service. "I've just come from an interview with Douglas Tucker, who has retracted his false confession. He was coerced by Gabriel Ware, who also orchestrated the 'witness' who claimed to see Samantha Tucker at the crime scene. Ware is the architect of this entire conspiracy. He murdered Fabien Tucker to prevent him from exposing a decades-long embezzlement scheme that implicates not only Ware but also the late Barnaby Tucker and, I suspect, a number of other public officials. Including, perhaps, the person who ordered me to drop the investigation."

Harrison's face went through several shades of purple. "How dare you. You have no evidence."

"I have a witness, Nina Marchetti, who is currently missing. I have Douglas Tucker's testimony. I have the financial trail that your people conveniently 'lost' or destroyed. And I have my own notes, which I have already emailed to a contact at the Crown Prosecution Service, the Independent Office for Police Conduct and three separate newspaper editors.

If anything happens to me, to Nina Marchetti, or to Douglas Tucker, those emails will be released. The full story will come out. Including your role in trying to cover it up."

Harrison stared at her, the bluster draining from his face, replaced by a cold, calculating fear. He was a cornered animal and Tiffany knew that cornered animals were the most dangerous kind. But she also knew that the only way to deal with them was to show no fear.

"You're making a mistake, Carney."

"I don't make mistakes, sir. Not on cases. I'm going to bring Gabriel Ware in for questioning. I'm going to charge him with the murder of Fabien Tucker. And you are going to have my back, because if you don't, I will take you down with him. Are we clear?"

For a long moment, the two of them faced each other. Then, slowly, Harrison deflated. He sank into his chair, the picture of a man who had just lost everything. "Clear," he said, his voice barely a whisper.

7.
The shark in the net

They arrested Gabriel Ware at his Chelsea townhouse at dawn. Tiffany led the team herself, a dozen officers, sirens silent until the last moment. They found him in a silk dressing gown, sipping espresso in a conservatory that overlooked a meticulously manicured garden. He didn't look surprised. He looked almost amused.

"Detective Carney," he said, setting down his cup. "I was wondering when you'd find your way back. You've been busy. Slandering my name, coercing a confession from a known addict, harassing my employees. I must say, your methods are unorthodox."

"They're effective, Mr. Ware." She read him his rights. "You are being arrested for the murder of Fabien Tucker."

Ware laughed, a cold, brittle sound. "On what evidence? The ravings of a drug addict? The fantasies of a disgruntled secretary? You have nothing."

"I have your car on CCTV leaving the Plaza shortly after the estimated time of death. I have a witness who will testify that you threatened her life if she revealed evidence of your financial crimes. I have a witness who will testify that you attempted to coerce a false confession from Douglas Tucker. And I have a forensic accountant who, after a second, more thorough review, has found the financial trail you thought you'd buried. It all leads back to you, Mr. Ware. The money, the threats, the murder. Every thread in this web has your fingerprints on it."

Ware's amusement faded, replaced by a cold, reptilian stillness. "You think you've won? You've uncovered a few accounting irregularities. You've linked me to a car that was stolen three weeks ago, by the way I reported it myself. Your case is made of smoke. It will dissolve the moment it meets the light of a courtroom."

"Perhaps," Tiffany said. "But we'll have that conversation at the station, under caution. Let's go."

At the station, Ware sat in the interview room with his solicitor, a silken-voiced barrister who seemed to be made entirely of expensive wool and condescension. For three hours, Tiffany and her team presented their evidence. The CCTV stills showed a black Range Rover matching Ware's description entering the Plaza at 12:47 a.m. and leaving at 1:22 a.m. Nina Marchetti, who had been found hiding with relatives in Brighton, gave a statement detailing the financial fraud and Ware's threats. Douglas Tucker, now with a new solicitor, gave a full account of Ware's attempt to coerce his confession. The forensic accountant presented a preliminary report showing a complex web of shell companies and offshore accounts that siphoned over £15 million from Tucker Industries and city regeneration funds over two decades, all ultimately controlled by Ware.

Ware's solicitor dismissed it all. The car was stolen. Marchetti was a disgruntled employee with a grudge. Douglas Tucker was a proven liar and addict. The financial report was speculative. There was no direct evidence linking Ware to the murder weapon, which was still missing. No DNA. No witnesses to the actual stabbing.

They had motive, means, and a pattern of behaviour but they didn't have the smoking gun. Tiffany knew that without it, Ware's expensive lawyers would pick their case apart. She needed something more. Something that would connect him directly to the act of killing.

As they took a break, Tiffany stood in the observation room staring at Ware through the one-way glass. He was calm, composed, occasionally whispering to his lawyer. He was enjoying this. He saw himself as a master strategist, always two moves ahead. He'd planned for this moment, had contingencies in place.

Her phone buzzed. It was Dr. Raj Patel.

"Tiffany, I've got something. The wound. I've been re-examining it. It's precise, as I said. Made by a long, thin blade. But here's the thing ...the angle. It was delivered from above. The killer was standing over the victim, who was already on the ground. But more than that, the angle of entry is slightly upward. It went in at a trajectory that suggests the killer was not only standing over him but was also… shorter. Significantly shorter. The victim was six feet one. The killer would have had to be at least five inches shorter to achieve that upward angle."

Tiffany's mind raced. Ware was tall, nearly six feet. Samantha was five-seven. Douglas was five-ten. None of them fit. The killer was someone else. Someone who hadn't been on their radar at all. Someone who was shorter than Fabien by a significant margin.

She thought about the staging, the nakedness, the presentation to the grandfather. The rage. The desire to humiliate. This wasn't a crime of business. It was a crime of passion, of a very specific, very personal kind. And the person who had that kind of passion for Fabien Tucker wasn't his wife, his brother or his business partner. It was someone who had been in his orbit, someone he had used and discarded. Someone with a reason to hate him that went far deeper than money.

She thought about the earring. Samantha had reported it missing weeks before the murder. Fabien had given it to another woman, one of his conquests. A woman who had worn it, who had been in the Tucker house, who had access to Samantha's jewellery case. A woman who, when Fabien had tired of her, had been cast aside. A woman who had then taken the earring, saved it, and used it as the final flourish in her act of revenge, placing it in his hand after she'd killed him, a final, mocking signature.

She pulled up the file on Fabien Tucker's known associates. There was a list of women, compiled by a private investigator Samantha had hired years ago. Names, addresses, dates. Most were fleeting. But one name recurred over a period of several months, about a year ago. A woman who had been seen with Fabien repeatedly, at restaurants, at hotels. A woman whose name had then disappeared from the list.

Tiffany's finger stopped on the name. Maria Santos. She'd been a junior planner in the city's development office. She'd left her job around the same time she'd disappeared from Fabien's life. No forwarding address. But there was a note in the file, written by the private investigator: "Santos seen at Willesden Boxing Gym. Trains regularly. Possible new partner."

A boxer. Or someone who trained at a boxing gym. Someone who would know how to wield a blade? Not a boxer, no. But someone who was strong, precise and used to close-quarters physicality. And importantly, someone who was likely to be short. Many female boxers in the lighter weight classes were petite.

Tiffany's heart was pounding. She grabbed her coat and headed for the door. As she passed the interview room, she saw Ware through the glass. He was smil-

ing now, a slow, confident smile. He knew they didn't have enough. He was going to walk.

Not if she could help it.

8.
Reckoning

The Willesden Boxing Gym was a cavernous, sweat-scented space on a back street that the Tucker regeneration money had somehow missed. It was the kind of place where the walls were stained with years of effort, and the only thing that mattered was what you could do with your fists. Tiffany found Maria Santos in the ring, sparring with a young man twice her size. She moved with a fluid, economical grace, her punches precise and controlled.

She was a small woman, no more than five-foot-four, with a compact, powerful build and dark hair pulled back in a severe ponytail. Even in the middle of a sparring session, there was something watchful about her, a stillness at her centre.

Tiffany waited until the round ended. Maria Santos climbed out of the ring, pulled off her gloves, and walked to a bench. She didn't look at Tiffany, but she spoke.

"I've been expecting you, Detective. I knew you'd figure it out eventually. I saw you on the news. You looked like the kind of person who wouldn't let them pin it on the wife."

"You're Maria Santos."

"I was. I'm Maria Santos again. I was 'the other woman' for a while. One of many. But I was the one who lasted the longest. I thought I was different. I thought he actually cared." She finally looked up, and Tiffany saw the depth of the pain there, a wound that had not healed but had been cauterized by rage. "He told me he loved me. He said he was going to leave her. He said I was the only one who understood him. And then, one day, he just… stopped answering my calls. I went to the house. Samantha was away. He was there, with another woman. He laughed at me. He said I was 'a bit of fun' but that I should 'know my place.' He told me I was nothing."

"So you killed him."

"I planned it for a year," Maria said, her voice flat. "I learned to be patient. I watched him. I learned his routines. I knew about the earring. I'd seen it in Samantha's room one day when he'd brought me there. I took it then, thinking I'd sell it. But later, it became part of the plan. A signature."

She spoke without emotion, as if recounting a series of logistical steps. "I knew he liked to go to the Plaza late at night. It was where his grandfather's statue was. He'd go there sometimes, to feel important, to be alone with his legacy. I waited for him. He was drunk. He didn't see me until I was right in front of him. He laughed again, at first. He thought I'd come to beg. I told him I'd come to show him what his legacy really was. I told him I was going to strip him bare, just like he'd stripped me of my dignity, my job, my self-respect."

"You made him undress."

"He was drunk and arrogant. He thought it was a game. He thought he could talk his way out of it, charm me. He started taking off his clothes, thinking it would lead somewhere else. By the time he realized it wasn't a game, it was too late. I had the knife. I told him to lie down. I told him to look at his grandfather's face and think about what he'd done to this city, to

the people in it. To me." A flicker of emotion crossed her face, there and gone. "He begged. He cried. He said he was sorry. But he wasn't sorry. He was just scared. I put the earring in his hand. I wanted him to die holding something he'd stolen from someone else. Something that proved he'd never respected anything."

"And then you stabbed him."

"One thrust. Precise. I'd trained for it. I wanted it to be clean. I didn't want him to suffer. I just wanted him to be gone. To be nothing." She looked at her hands, the hands that had ended a life. "I left him there, for his grandfather to see. Let the old man look at what his dynasty had produced."

Tiffany sat beside her on the bench. The gym was quiet now, the other boxers having drifted away, sensing something they didn't want to witness. "You know I have to take you in, Maria."

"I know." She nodded slowly. "I'm ready. I've been ready for a year. I just wanted someone to know the truth. The whole truth. Not the story they were trying to sell ...the jealous wife, the desperate brother, the greedy business partner. I wanted someone to know that he was killed by someone he'd made into

nothing. That his own actions, his own cruelty, created the person who ended him."

Tiffany pulled out her handcuffs, but she didn't put them on. Not yet. "Why didn't you come forward? Why let Samantha and Douglas almost go to prison for something you did?"

Maria's eyes filled with tears for the first time. "Because I was a coward. Because after I did it, I was so… empty. I thought the rage would go away, but it didn't. It just turned into this cold, grey nothing. I didn't care who they blamed. I didn't care about anything. I still don't, really. But I'm glad it was you who found me. You're the one who saw through it all. You're the one who kept looking."

Tiffany stood up. "Maria Santos, I am arresting you for the murder of Fabien Tucker. You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence."

She recited the words by rote, but her voice was gentle. As she clicked the handcuffs into place, she felt a strange sense of closure. The case was solved.

The truth was out. But there was no triumph in it. Only the quiet, somber satisfaction of a job done, a puzzle solved, a measure of justice served.

Epilogue

Three months later Tiffany Carney stood in the garden of her Kensal Rise house. It was spring. The first green shoots were pushing through the damp soil. She'd spent the morning planting, something she and Michael had always done together. It had felt wrong at first, doing it alone. But as the hours passed, the physical labour had brought a kind of peace.

The case was over. Maria Santos had been charged and was awaiting trial. Her confession was detailed and consistent and with Tiffany's investigation, the case against her was solid. Gabriel Ware had not been charged with murder but the financial investigation, now pursued by a special unit with no ties to the corrupt Chief Constable, had uncovered enough

evidence of fraud and money laundering to put him away for decades. Harrison had resigned, his career in ruins. Samantha Tucker had been cleared. Douglas Tucker had checked into a rehabilitation facility, his debts wiped clean by the seizure of Ware's assets.

Tiffany's own life was beginning to take a new shape. The silence in the house was still there, but it had changed. It was no longer a void. It was a space. A space she was learning to fill with her own rhythms, her own presence. She'd taken a leave of absence from the force, the first real break she'd had in thirty years. She was reading Michael's Le Carré novel, the one he'd left with the bookmark one-third of the way through. She was almost finished.

She thought about Maria Santos. About the rage that had consumed her, the meticulous planning, the cold execution. She thought about the earring, clutched in Fabien's dead hand. A final, desperate grab for something that had never been his. In the end, the truth had been simple, as truths often were. Not about money, not about power but about the human heart, its capacity for cruelty, its hunger for recognition and the terrible things that happened when that hunger was starved.

Tiffany had spent her career looking for the truth, peeling back layers of lies to find the core of a story. In her own life, she was learning to do the same. The emptiness, she realized, was not something to be filled. It was something to be accepted, a part of the landscape of her life now. And within it, she was finding a new kind of strength, a quieter, more resilient version of the woman she had been.

She turned back to the house. The lights were on. She'd left them on, a habit from the days when Michael was sick, when she'd wanted to come home to a house that didn't feel like a tomb. Now, it felt like something else. A place that was hers. A place where she could sit in his armchair, finish his book and know that she had done what she had always done, she had seen the truth and she had not looked away.

The door was unlocked. She went inside, ready for the silence, ready for the evening ahead. The case was closed. Her life, in all its new and unfamiliar dimensions, was open.

THE END

Shark's rising tide

Thanos Kalamidas

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A detective Tiffany Carney of Växjö case.

SHARK'S RISING TIDE

Thanos Kalamidas, a multipublished writer, cartoonist and illustrator; born and grew up in a picturesque neighbourhood on the mountainside of Hymettus in Athens, Greece. Then his life took him to Berlin, Germany and to London, UK for studies. After a brief stay in Yorkshire he moved his life to Paris, France while working in Tokyo, Japan and in Cape Town, South Africa. In the last 25 years he became a permanent Scandinavian resident and recently, in his glorious sixth decade, he moved to a scenic village in the Växjö area.

THANOS KALAMIDAS